









RESPONSIBILITIES  
AND OTHER POEMS



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
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ATLANTA • SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED  
LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA  
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, Ltd.  
TORONTO

# RESPONSIBILITIES

AND OTHER POEMS

BY  
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

New York  
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
1916

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Set up and electrotyped. Published November, 1916.

33

\$1.25

NOV -2 1916

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no. 1.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
RESPONSIBILITIES, 1912-1914—	
INTRODUCTORY RHYMES . . . . .	1
THE GREY ROCK . . . . .	3
THE TWO KINGS . . . . .	11
TO A WEALTHY MAN . . . . .	29
SEPTEMBER 1913 . . . . .	32
TO A FRIEND WHOSE WORK HAS COME TO NOTHING . . . . .	34
PAUDEEN . . . . .	35
TO A SHADE . . . . .	36
WHEN HELEN LIVED . . . . .	39
THE ATTACK ON 'THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD,' 1907 . . . . .	40
THE THREE BEGGARS . . . . .	41
THE THREE HERMITS . . . . .	45
BEGGAR TO BEGGAR CRIED . . . . .	47
THE WELL AND THE TREE . . . . .	49
RUNNING TO PARADISE . . . . .	50
THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN . . . . .	52
THE PLAYER QUEEN . . . . .	59
THE REALISTS . . . . .	61
THE WITCH . . . . .	62
THE PEACOCK . . . . .	63

	PAGE
THE MOUNTAIN TOMB . . . . .	64
TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND . . . . .	66
A MEMORY OF YOUTH . . . . .	68
FALLEN MAJESTY . . . . .	70
FRIENDS . . . . .	71
THE COLD HEAVEN . . . . .	73
THAT THE NIGHT COME . . . . .	75
AN APPOINTMENT . . . . .	76
THE MAGI . . . . .	77
THE DOLLS . . . . .	78
A COAT . . . . .	80
CLOSING RHYMES . . . . .	81
FROM THE GREEN HELMET AND OTHER POEMS, 1909-1912—	
HIS DREAM . . . . .	85
A WOMAN HOMER SUNG . . . . .	87
THE CONSOLATION . . . . .	89
NO SECOND TROY . . . . .	91
RECONCILIATION . . . . .	92
KING AND NO KING . . . . .	94
PEACE . . . . .	96
AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE . . . . .	97
THE FASCINATION OF WHAT'S DIFFICULT . . . . .	99
A DRINKING SONG . . . . .	101
THE COMING OF WISDOM WITH TIME . . . . .	102
ON HEARING THAT THE STUDENTS OF OUR NEW UNIVERSITY HAVE JOINED THE ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS . . . . .	103
TO A POET . . . . .	104

# CONTENTS

vii

PAGE

THE MASK . . . . .	105
UPON A HOUSE SHAKEN BY THE LAND	
AGITATION . . . . .	106
AT THE ABBEY THEATRE . . . . .	108
THESE ARE THE CLOUDS . . . . .	110
AT GALWAY RACES . . . . .	112
A FRIEND'S ILLNESS . . . . .	113
ALL THINGS CAN TEMPT ME . . . . .	114
THE YOUNG MAN'S SONG . . . . .	115
THE HOUR-GLASS—1912 . . . . .	117
NOTES . . . . .	181



*'In dreams begins responsibility.'*

*Old Play.*

*'How am I fallen from myself, for a  
long time now*

*I have not seen the Prince of Chang in  
my dreams.'*

*Khoung-fou-tseu.*



## RESPONSIBILITIES





*Pardon, old fathers, if you still remain  
Somewhere in ear-shot for the story's  
end,  
Old Dublin merchant 'free of ten and  
four'  
Or trading out of Galway into Spain;  
And country scholar, Robert Emmet's  
friend,  
A hundred-year-old memory to the poor;  
Traders or soldiers who have left me  
blood  
That has not passed through any hux-  
ter's loin,  
Pardon, and you that did not weigh  
the cost,  
Old Butlers when you took to horse and  
stood  
Beside the brackish waters of the Boyne  
Till your bad master blenched and all  
was lost;*

*You merchant skipper that leaped over-  
board  
After a ragged hat in Biscay Bay,  
You most of all, silent and fierce old  
man  
Because you were the spectacle that  
stirred  
My fancy, and set my boyish lips to say  
'Only the wasteful virtues earn the  
sun';  
Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,  
Although I have come close on forty-  
nine  
I have no child, I have nothing but a  
book,  
Nothing but that to prove your blood  
and mine.*

*January 1914.*

## THE GREY ROCK

*Poets with whom I learned my trade,  
Companions of the Cheshire Cheese,  
Here's an old story I've re-made,  
Imagining 'twould better please  
Your ears than stories now in fashion,  
Though you may think I waste my  
breath*

*Pretending that there can be passion  
That has more life in it than death,  
And though at bottling of your wine  
The bow-legged Goban had no say;  
The moral's yours because it's mine.*

When cups went round at close of  
day—

Is not that how good stories run?—  
Somewhere within some hollow hill,

If books speak truth in Slievenamon,  
But let that be, the gods were still  
And sleepy, having had their meal,  
And smoky torches made a glare  
On painted pillars, on a deal  
Of fiddles and of flutes hung there  
By the ancient holy hands that brought  
them

From murmuring Murias, on cups—  
Old Goban hammered them and  
wrought them,

And put his pattern round their tops  
To hold the wine they buy of him.  
But from the juice that made them  
wise

All those had lifted up the dim  
Imaginations of their eyes,  
For one that was like woman made  
Before their sleepy eyelids ran  
And trembling with her passion said,  
'Come out and dig for a dead man,  
Who's burrowing somewhere in the  
ground,

And mock him to his face and then  
Hollo him on with horse and hound,  
For he is the worst of all dead men.'

*We should be dazed and terror struck,  
If we but saw in dreams that room,  
Those wine-drenched eyes, and curse our  
luck*

*That emptied all our days to come.  
I knew a woman none could please,  
Because she dreamed when but a child  
Of men and women made like these;  
And after, when her blood ran wild,  
Had ravelled her own story out,  
And said, 'In two or in three years  
I need must marry some poor lout,'  
And having said it burst in tears.  
Since, tavern comrades, you have died,  
Maybe your images have stood,  
Mere bone and muscle thrown aside,  
Before that roomful or as good.  
You had to face your ends when young—  
'Twas wine or women, or some curse—*

*But never made a poorer song  
That you might have a heavier purse,  
Nor gave loud service to a cause  
That you might have a troop of friends.  
You kept the Muses' sterner laws,  
And unrepenting faced your ends,  
And therefore earned the right—and yet  
Dowson and Johnson most I praise—  
To troop with those the world's forgot,  
And copy their proud steady gaze.*

‘The Danish troop was driven out  
Between the dawn and dusk,’ she  
said;

‘Although the event was long in  
doubt,

Although the King of Ireland's dead  
And half the kings, before sundown  
All was accomplished.’

‘When this day  
Murrough, the King of Ireland's son,  
Foot after foot was giving way,

He and his best troops back to back  
Had perished there, but the Danes ran,  
Stricken with panic from the attack,  
The shouting of an unseen man;  
And being thankful Murrough found,  
Led by a footsole dipped in blood  
That had made prints upon the ground,  
Where by old thorn trees that man  
stood;

And though when he gazed here and  
there,

He had but gazed on thorn trees,  
spoke,

“Who is the friend that seems but air  
And yet could give so fine a stroke?”

Thereon a young man met his eye,  
Who said, “Because she held me in  
Her love, and would not have me die,  
Rock-nurtured Aoife took a pin,

And pushing it into my shirt,  
Promised that for a pin’s sake,  
No man should see to do me hurt;  
But there it’s gone; I will not take

The fortune that had been my shame  
Seeing, King's son, what wounds you  
have."

'Twas roundly spoke, but when night  
came

He had betrayed me to his grave,  
For he and the King's son were dead.  
I'd promised him two hundred years,  
And when for all I'd done or said—  
And these immortal eyes shed tears—  
He claimed his country's need was  
most,

I'd save his life, yet for the sake  
Of a new friend he has turned a ghost.  
What does he care if my heart break?  
I call for spade and horse and hound  
That we may harry him.' Thereon  
She cast herself upon the ground  
And rent her clothes and made her  
moan:

'Why are they faithless when their  
might

Is from the holy shades that rove



The grey rock and the windy light?  
Why should the faithfullest heart  
    most love  
The bitter sweetness of false faces?  
Why must the lasting love what  
    passes,  
Why are the gods by men betrayed!'

But thereon every god stood up  
With a slow smile and without sound,  
And stretching forth his arm and cup  
To where she moaned upon the  
    ground,  
Suddenly drenched her to the skin;  
And she with Goban's wine adrip,  
No more remembering what had been,  
Stared at the gods with laughing lip.

*I have kept my faith, though faith was  
    tried,  
To that rock-born, rock-wandering foot,  
And the world's altered since you died,  
And I am in no good repute*

*With the loud host before the sea,  
That think sword strokes were better  
    meant  
Than lover's music—let that be,  
So that the wandering foot's content.*

## THE TWO KINGS

KING EOCHAID came at sundown to a  
wood

Westward of Tara. Hurrying to his  
queen

He had out-ridden his war-wasted men  
That with empounded cattle trod the  
mire;

And where beech trees had mixed a  
pale green light

With the ground-ivy's blue, he saw a  
stag

Whiter than curds, its eyes the tint  
of the sea.

Because it stood upon his path and  
seemed

More hands in height than any stag  
in the world

He sat with tightened rein and loosened  
mouth

Upon his trembling horse, then drove  
the spur;

But the stag stooped and ran at him,  
and passed,

Rending the horse's flank. King  
Eochaid reeled

Then drew his sword to hold its  
levelled point

Against the stag. When horn and  
steel were met

The horn resounded as though it had  
been silver,

A sweet, miraculous, terrifying sound.

Horn locked in sword, they tugged  
and struggled there

As though a stag and unicorn were  
met

In Africa on Mountain of the Moon,

Until at last the double horns, drawn  
backward,

Butted below the single and so pierced

The entrails of the horse. Dropping  
his sword  
King Eochaid seized the horns in his  
strong hands  
And stared into the sea-green eye, and  
so  
Hither and thither to and fro they trod  
Till all the place was beaten into mire.  
The strong thigh and the agile thigh  
were met,  
The hands that gathered up the might  
of the world,  
And hoof and horn that had sucked in  
their speed  
Amid the elaborate wilderness of the air.  
Through bush they plunged and over  
ivied root,  
And where the stone struck fire, while  
in the leaves  
A squirrel whinnied and a bird screamed  
out;  
But when at last he forced those  
sinewy flanks

Against a beech bole, he threw down  
the beast

And knelt above it with drawn knife.

On the instant

It vanished like a shadow, and a cry  
So mournful that it seemed the cry of  
one

Who had lost some unimaginable  
treasure

Wandered between the blue and the  
green leaf

And climbed into the air, crumbling  
away,

Till all had seemed a shadow or a vision  
But for the trodden mire, the pool of  
blood,

The disembowelled horse.

King Eochaid ran,  
Toward peopled Tara, nor stood to  
draw his breath

Until he came before the painted wall,  
The posts of polished yew, circled  
with bronze,

Of the great door; but though the  
    hanging lamps  
Showed their faint light through the  
    unshuttered windows,  
Nor door, nor mouth, nor slipper made  
    a noise,  
Nor on the ancient beaten paths, that  
    wound  
From well-side or from plough-land,  
    was there noise;  
And there had been no sound of  
    living thing  
Before him or behind, but that far-off  
On the horizon edge bellowed the herds.  
Knowing that silence brings no good  
    to kings,  
And mocks returning victory, he  
    passed  
Between the pillars with a beating  
    heart  
And saw where in the midst of the  
    great hall  
Pale-faced, alone upon a bench, Edain

Sat upright with a sword before her  
feet.

Her hands on either side had gripped  
the bench,

Her eyes were cold and steady, her  
lips tight.

Some passion had made her stone.  
Hearing a foot

She started and then knew whose  
foot it was;

But when he thought to take her in  
his arms

She motioned him afar, and rose and  
spoke:

‘I have sent among the fields or to  
the woods

The fighting men and servants of this  
house,

For I would have your judgment  
upon one

Who is self-accused. If she be innocent  
She would not look in any known  
man’s face



THE TWO KINGS 17

Till judgment has been given, and if  
guilty,

Will never look again on known man's  
face.'

And at these words he paled, as she  
had paled,

Knowing that he should find upon  
her lips

The meaning of that monstrous  
day.

Then she:

'You brought me where your brother  
Ardan sat

Always in his one seat, and bid me  
care him

Through that strange illness that had  
fixed him there,

And should he die to heap his burial  
mound

And carve his name in Ogham.'

Eochaid said,

'He lives?' 'He lives and is a healthy  
man.'

‘While I have him and you it matters  
little

What man you have lost, what evil  
you have found.’

‘I bid them make his bed under this roof  
And carried him his food with my  
own hands,

And so the weeks passed by. But  
when I said

“What is this trouble?” he would  
answer nothing,

Though always at my words his trouble  
grew;

And I but asked the more, till he cried  
out,

Weary of many questions: “There  
are things

That make the heart akin to the dumb  
stone.”

Then I replied: “Although you hide  
a secret,

Hopeless and dear, or terrible to think  
on,

Speak it, that I may send through the  
wide world

For medicine." Thereon he cried aloud:

"Day after day you question me, and I,  
Because there is such a storm amid  
my thoughts

I shall be carried in the gust, command,  
Forbid, beseech and waste my breath."

Then I,

"Although the thing that you have  
hid were evil,

The speaking of it could be no great  
wrong,

And evil must it be, if done 'twere  
worse

Than mound and stone that keep all  
virtue in,

And loosen on us dreams that waste  
our life,

Shadows and shows that can but turn  
the brain."

But finding him still silent I stooped  
down

And whispering that none but he  
should hear,  
Said: "If a woman has put this on you,  
My men, whether it please her or  
displease,  
And though they have to cross the  
Loughlan waters  
And take her in the middle of armed  
men,  
Shall make her look upon her handi-  
work,  
That she may quench the rick she has  
fired; and though  
She may have worn silk clothes, or  
worn a crown,  
She'll not be proud, knowing within  
her heart  
That our sufficient portion of the world  
Is that we give, although it be brief  
giving,  
Happiness to children and to men."  
Then he, driven by his thought beyond  
his thought,

THE TWO KINGS 21

And speaking what he would not  
though he would,

Sighed: "You, even you yourself,  
could work the cure!"

And at those words I rose and I went  
out

And for nine days he had food from  
other hands,

And for nine days my mind went  
whirling round

The one disastrous zodiac, muttering  
That the immedicable mound's beyond  
Our questioning, beyond our pity even.  
But when nine days had gone I stood  
again

Before his chair and bending down  
my head

Told him, that when Orion rose, and  
all

The women of his household were  
asleep,

To go—for hope would give his limbs  
the power—

To an old empty woodman's house  
that's hidden

Close to a clump of beech trees in the  
wood

Westward of Tara, there to await a  
friend

That could, as he had told her, work  
his cure

And would be no harsh friend.

When night had deepened,  
I groped my way through boughs,  
and over roots,

Till oak and hazel ceased and beech  
began,

And found the house, a sputtering  
torch within,

And stretched out sleeping on a pile  
of skins

Ardan, and though I called to him  
and tried

To shake him out of sleep, I could not  
rouse him.

I waited till the night was on the turn,

Then fearing that some labourer, on  
his way  
To plough or pasture-land, might see  
me there,  
Went out.

Among the ivy-covered rocks,  
As on the blue light of a sword, a man  
Who had unnatural majesty, and eyes  
Like the eyes of some great kite  
scouring the woods,  
Stood on my path. Trembling from  
head to foot  
I gazed at him like grouse upon a kite;  
But with a voice that had unnatural  
music,  
“A weary wooing and a long,” he said,  
“Speaking of love through other lips  
and looking  
Under the eyelids of another, for it  
was my craft  
That put a passion in the sleeper there,  
And when I had got my will and  
drawn you here,

Where I may speak to you alone, my  
craft

Sucked up the passion out of him  
again

And left mere sleep. He'll wake when  
the sun wakes,

Push out his vigorous limbs and rub  
his eyes,

And wonder what has ailed him these  
twelve months."

I cowered back upon the wall in terror,  
But that sweet-sounding voice ran on:

"Woman,

I was your husband when you rode  
the air,

Danced in the whirling foam and in  
the dust,

In days you have not kept in memory,  
Being betrayed into a cradle, and I  
come

That I may claim you as my wife  
again."

I was no longer terrified, his voice



THE TWO KINGS 25

Had half awakened some old memory,  
Yet answered him: "I am King  
Eochaid's wife  
And with him have found every  
happiness  
Women can find." With a most  
masterful voice,  
That made the body seem as it were  
a string  
Under a bow, he cried: "What hap-  
piness  
Can lovers have that know their  
happiness  
Must end at the dumb stone? But  
where we build  
Our sudden palaces in the still air  
Pleasure itself can bring no weariness,  
Nor can time waste the cheek, nor is  
there foot  
That has grown weary of the whirling  
dance,  
Nor an unlaughing mouth, but mine  
that mourns,

Among those mouths that sing their  
sweethearts' praise,  
Your empty bed." "How should I  
love," I answered,  
"Were it not that when the dawn  
has lit my bed  
And shown my husband sleeping there,  
I have sighed,  
'Your strength and nobleness will  
pass away.'  
Or how should love be worth its pains  
were it not  
That when he has fallen asleep within  
my arms,  
Being wearied out, I love in man the  
child?  
What can they know of love that do  
not know  
She builds her nest upon a narrow  
ledge  
Above a windy precipice?" Then he:  
"Seeing that when you come to the  
death-bed

You must return, whether you would  
or no,

This human life blotted from memory,  
Why must I live some thirty, forty  
years,

Alone with all this useless happiness?"

Thereon he seized me in his arms,  
but I

Thrust him away with both my hands  
and cried,

"Never will I believe there is any  
change

Can blot out of my memory this  
life

Sweetened by death, but if I could  
believe

That were a double hunger in my lips  
For what is doubly brief."

And now the shape,  
My hands were pressed to, vanished  
suddenly.

I staggered, but a beech tree stayed  
my fall,

And clinging to it I could hear the  
cocks

Crow upon Tara.'

King Eochaid bowed his head  
And thanked her for her kindness to  
his brother,

For that she promised, and for that  
refused.

Thereon the bellowing of the em-  
pounded herds

Rose round the walls, and through the  
bronze-ringed door

Jostled and shouted those war-wasted  
men,

And in the midst King Eochaid's  
brother stood.

He'd heard that din on the horizon's  
edge

And ridden towards it, being ignorant.

TO A WEALTHY MAN WHO PROMISED  
A SECOND SUBSCRIPTION TO THE  
DUBLIN MUNICIPAL GALLERY IF  
IT WERE PROVED THE PEOPLE  
WANTED PICTURES

You gave but will not give again  
Until enough of Pauden's pence  
By Biddy's halfpennies have lain  
To be 'some sort of evidence,'  
Before you'll put your guineas down,  
That things it were a pride to give  
Are what the blind and ignorant town  
Imagines best to make it thrive.  
What cared Duke Ercole, that bid  
His mummers to the market place,  
What th' onion-sellers thought or did  
So that his Plautus set the pace  
For the Italian comedies?  
And Guidobaldo, when he made

30 TO A WEALTHY MAN

That grammar school of courtesies  
Where wit and beauty learned their  
trade

Upon Urbino's windy hill,  
Had sent no runners to and fro  
That he might learn the shepherds'  
will.

And when they drove out Cosimo,  
Indifferent how the rancour ran,  
He gave the hours they had set  
free

To Michelozzo's latest plan  
For the San Marco Library,  
Whence turbulent Italy should draw  
Delight in Art whose end is peace,  
In logic and in natural law  
By sucking at the dugs of Greece.

Your open hand but shows our loss,  
For he knew better how to live.  
Let Paudeens play at pitch and toss,  
Look up in the sun's eye and give  
What the exultant heart calls good

TO A WEALTHY MAN 31

That some new day may breed the  
best

Because you gave, not what they  
would

But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!

*December 1912.*

## SEPTEMBER 1913

WHAT need you, being come to sense,  
But fumble in a greasy till  
And add the halfpence to the pence  
And prayer to shivering prayer, until  
You have dried the marrow from the  
bone;  
For men were born to pray and save:  
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet they were of a different kind  
The names that stilled your childish  
play,  
They have gone about the world like  
wind,  
But little time had they to pray  
For whom the hangman's rope was  
spun,



And what, God help us, could they  
save:

Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Was it for this the wild geese spread  
The grey wing upon every tide;  
For this that all that blood was shed,  
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,  
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,  
All that delirium of the brave;  
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet could we turn the years again,  
And call those exiles as they were,  
In all their loneliness and pain  
You'd cry 'some woman's yellow hair  
Has maddened every mother's son':  
They weighed so lightly what they  
gave,  
But let them be, they're dead and gone,  
They're with O'Leary in the grave.

TO A FRIEND WHOSE WORK  
HAS COME TO NOTHING

Now all the truth is out,  
Be secret and take defeat  
From any brazen throat,  
For how can you compete,  
Being honour bred, with one  
Who, were it proved he lies,  
Were neither shamed in his own  
Nor in his neighbours' eyes?  
Bred to a harder thing  
Than Triumph, turn away  
And like a laughing string  
Whereon mad fingers play  
Amid a place of stone,  
Be secret and exult,  
Because of all things known  
That is most difficult.

## PAUDEEN

INDIGNANT at the fumbling wits, the  
obscure spite  
Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I  
stumbled blind  
Among the stones and thorn trees,  
under morning light;  
Until a curlew cried and in the lumi-  
nous wind  
A curlew answered; and suddenly  
thereupon I thought  
That on the lonely height where all  
are in God's eye,  
There cannot be, confusion of our  
sound forgot,  
A single soul that lacks a sweet crys-  
taline cry.

## TO A SHADE

IF you have revisited the town, thin  
Shade,

Whether to look upon your monument  
(I wonder if the builder has been paid)  
Or happier thoughted when the day  
is spent

To drink of that salt breath out of  
the sea

When grey gulls flit about instead of  
men,

And the gaunt houses put on majesty:  
Let these content you and be gone  
again;

For they are at their old tricks yet.

A man  
Of your own passionate serving kind  
who had brought

In his full hands what, had they only  
known,  
Had given their children's children  
loftier thought,  
Sweeter emotion, working in their  
veins  
Like gentle blood, has been driven  
from the place,  
And insult heaped upon him for his  
pains  
And for his open-handedness, dis-  
grace;  
An old foul mouth that slandered  
you had set  
The pack upon him.

Go, unquiet wanderer,  
And gather the Glasnevin coverlet  
About your head till the dust stops  
your ear,  
The time for you to taste of that salt  
breath  
And listen at the corners has not  
come;

You had enough of sorrow before  
death—

Away, away! You are safer in the  
tomb.

*September 29th, 1914.*

## WHEN HELEN LIVED

WE have cried in our despair  
That men desert,  
For some trivial affair  
Or noisy, insolent sport,  
Beauty that we have won  
From bitterest hours;  
Yet we, had we walked within  
Those topless towers  
Where Helen walked with her boy,  
Had given but as the rest  
Of the men and women of Troy,  
A word and a jest.

THE ATTACK ON 'THE PLAYBOY  
OF THE WESTERN WORLD,'  
1907

ONCE, when midnight smote the air,  
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met  
From thoroughfare to thoroughfare,  
While that great Juan galloped by;  
And like these to rail and sweat  
Staring upon his sinewy thigh.



## THE THREE BEGGARS

*'Though to my feathers in the wet,  
I have stood here from break of day,  
I have not found a thing to eat  
For only rubbish comes my way.  
Am I to live on lebeen-lone?'  
Muttered the old crane of Gort.  
'For all my pains on lebeen-lone.'*

King Guari walked amid his court  
The palace-yard and river-side  
And there to three old beggars said:  
'You that have wandered far and  
wide  
Can ravel out what's in my head.  
Do men who least desire get most,  
Or get the most who most desire?'  
A beggar said: 'They get the most

## 42 THE THREE BEGGARS

Whom man or devil cannot tire,  
And what could make their muscles  
taut

Unless desire had made them so.’  
But Guari laughed with secret thought,  
‘If that be true as it seems true,  
One of you three is a rich man,  
For he shall have a thousand pounds  
Who is first asleep, if but he can  
Sleep before the third noon sounds.’  
And thereon merry as a bird,  
With his old thoughts King Guari  
went

From river-side and palace-yard  
And left them to their argument.  
‘And if I win,’ one beggar said,  
‘Though I am old I shall persuade  
A pretty girl to share my bed’;  
The second: ‘I shall learn a trade’;  
The third: ‘I’ll hurry to the course  
Among the other gentlemen,  
And lay it all upon a horse’;  
The second: ‘I have thought again:

A farmer has more dignity.'  
One to another sighed and cried:  
The exorbitant dreams of beggary,  
That idleness had borne to pride,  
Sang through their teeth from noon  
to noon;

And when the second twilight brought  
The frenzy of the beggars' moon  
They closed their blood-shot eyes for  
naught.

One beggar cried: 'You're shamming  
sleep.'

And thereupon their anger grew  
Till they were whirling in a heap.

They'd mauled and bitten the night  
through

Or sat upon their heels to rail,  
And when old Guari came and stood  
Before the three to end this tale,  
They were commingling lice and blood.  
'Time's up,' he cried, and all the  
three

## 44 THE THREE BEGGARS

With blood-shot eyes upon him stared.  
'Time's up,' he cried, and all the  
three  
Fell down upon the dust and snored.

*'Maybe I shall be lucky yet,  
Now they are silent,' said the crane.  
'Though to my feathers in the wet  
I've stood as I were made of stone  
And seen the rubbish run about,  
It's certain there are trout somewhere  
And maybe I shall take a trout  
If but I do not seem to care.'*

## THE THREE HERMITS

THREE old hermits took the air  
By a cold and desolate sea,  
First was muttering a prayer,  
Second rummaged for a flea;  
On a windy stone, the third,  
Giddy with his hundredth year,  
Sang unnoticed like a bird.  
‘Though the Door of Death is near  
And what waits behind the door,  
Three times in a single day  
I, though upright on the shore,  
Fall asleep when I should pray.’  
So the first but now the second,  
‘We’re but given what we have  
    earned  
When all thoughts and deeds are  
    reckoned,  
So it’s plain to be discerned

46 THE THREE HERMITS

That the shades of holy men,  
Who have failed being weak of will,  
Pass the Door of Birth again,  
And are plagued by crowds, until  
They've the passion to escape.'  
Moaned the other, 'They are thrown  
Into some most fearful shape.'  
But the second mocked his moan:  
'They are not changed to anything,  
Having loved God once, but maybe,  
To a poet or a king  
Or a witty lovely lady.'  
While he'd rummaged rags and hair,  
Caught and cracked his flea, the third,  
Giddy with his hundredth year  
Sang unnoticed like a bird.

## BEGGAR TO BEGGAR CRIED

‘TIME to put off the world and go  
somewhere

And find my health again in the sea  
air,’

Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-  
struck,

‘And make my soul before my pate  
is bare.’

‘And get a comfortable wife and house  
To rid me of the devil in my shoes,’

Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-  
struck,

‘And the worse devil that is between  
my thighs.’

‘And though I’d marry with a comely  
lass,

## 48 BEGGAR TO BEGGAR CRIED

She need not be too comely—let it  
pass,’

Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-  
struck,

‘But there’s a devil in a looking-  
glass.’

‘Nor should she be too rich, because  
the rich

Are driven by wealth as beggars by  
the itch,’

Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-  
struck,

‘And cannot have a humorous happy  
speech.’

‘And there I’ll grow respected at my  
ease,

And hear amid the garden’s nightly  
peace,’

Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-  
struck,

‘The wind-blown clamor of the  
barnacle-geese.’



## THE WELL AND THE TREE

‘THE Man that I praise,’  
Cries out the empty well,  
‘Lives all his days  
Where a hand on the bell  
Can call the milch-cows  
To the comfortable door of his house.  
Who but an idiot would praise  
Dry stones in a well?’

‘The Man that I praise,’  
Cries out the leafless tree,  
‘Has married and stays  
By an old hearth, and he  
On naught has set store  
But children and dogs on the floor.  
Who but an idiot would praise  
A withered tree?’

## RUNNING TO PARADISE

As I came over Windy Gap  
They threw a halfpenny into my cap,  
For I am running to Paradise;  
And all that I need do is to wish  
And somebody puts his hand in the  
dish  
To throw me a bit of salted fish:  
And there the king *is* but as the  
beggar.

My brother Mourteen is worn out  
With skelping his big brawling lout,  
And I am running to Paradise;  
A poor life do what he can,  
And though he keep a dog and a gun,  
A serving maid and a serving man:  
And there the king *is* but as the  
beggar.

RUNNING TO PARADISE 51

Poor men have grown to be rich men,  
And rich men grown to be poor again,  
And I am running to Paradise;  
And many a darling wit's grown dull  
That tossed a bare heel when at school,  
Now it has filled an old sock full:  
And there the king *is* but as the  
beggar.

The wind is old and still at play  
While I must hurry upon my way,  
For I am running to Paradise;  
Yet never have I lit on a friend  
To take my fancy like the wind  
That nobody can buy or bind:  
And there the king *is* but as the  
beggar.

## THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN

A ONE-LEGGED, one-armed, one-eyed  
man,

A bundle of rags upon a crutch,  
Stumbled on windy Cruachan  
Cursing the wind. It was as much  
As the one sturdy leg could do  
To keep him upright while he cursed.  
He had counted, where long years ago  
Queen Maeve's nine Maines had been  
nursed,

A pair of lapwings, one old sheep  
And not a house to the plain's edge,  
When close to his right hand a heap  
Of grey stones and a rocky ledge  
Reminded him that he could make,  
If he but shifted a few stones,  
A shelter till the daylight broke.

## THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN 53

But while he fumbled with the stones  
They toppled over; 'Were it not  
I have a lucky wooden shin  
I had been hurt'; and toppling  
brought  
Before his eyes, where stones had  
been,  
A dark deep hole in the rock's face.  
He gave a gasp and thought to  
run,  
Being certain it was no right place  
But the Hell Mouth at Cruachan  
That's stuffed with all that's old and  
bad,  
And yet stood still, because inside  
He had seen a red-haired jolly lad  
In some outlandish coat beside  
A ladle and a tub of beer,  
Plainly no phantom by his look.  
So with a laugh at his own fear  
He crawled into that pleasant nook.  
Young Red-head stretched himself to  
yawn

54 THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN

And murmured, 'May God curse the  
night

That's grown uneasy near the dawn  
So that it seems even I sleep light;  
And who are you that wakens me?  
Has one of Maeve's nine brawling sons  
Grown tired of his own company?  
But let him keep his grave for once  
I have to find the sleep I have lost.'  
And then at last being wide awake,  
'I took you for a brawling ghost,  
Say what you please, but from day-  
break

I'll sleep another century.'  
The beggar deaf to all but hope  
Went down upon a hand and knee  
And took the wooden ladle up  
And would have dipped it in the beer  
But the other pushed his hand aside,  
'Before you have dipped it in the beer  
That sacred Goban brewed,' he cried,  
'I'd have assurance that you are able  
To value beer—I will have no fool

## THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN 55

Dipping his nose into my ladle  
Because he has stumbled on this hole  
In the bad hour before the dawn.  
If you but drink that beer and say  
I will sleep until the winter's gone,  
Or maybe, to Midsummer Day  
You will sleep that length; and at the  
first

I waited so for that or this—  
Because the weather was a-cursed  
Or I had no woman there to kiss,  
And slept for half a year or so;  
But year by year I found that less  
Gave me such pleasure I'd forgo  
Even a half hour's nothingness,  
And when at one year's end I found  
I had not waked a single minute,  
I chose this burrow under ground.  
I will sleep away all Time within it:  
My sleep were now nine centuries  
But for those mornings when I find  
The lapwing at their foolish cries  
And the sheep bleating at the wind

56 THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN

As when I also played the fool.'  
The beggar in a rage began  
Upon his hunkers in the hole,  
'It's plain that you are no right man  
To mock at everything I love  
As if it were not worth the doing.  
I'd have a merry life enough  
If a good Easter wind were blowing,  
And though the winter wind is bad  
I should not be too down in the mouth  
For anything you did or said  
If but this wind were in the south.'  
But the other cried, 'You long for  
spring  
Or that the wind would shift a point  
And do not know that you would  
bring,  
If time were suppler in the joint,  
Neither the spring nor the south wind  
But the hour when you shall pass  
away  
And leave no smoking wick behind,  
For all life longs for the Last Day



## THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN 57

And there's no man but cocks his ear  
To know when Michael's trumpet  
cries

That flesh and bone may disappear,  
And souls as if they were but sighs,  
And there be nothing but God left;  
But I alone being blessed keep  
Like some old rabbit to my cleft  
And wait Him in a drunken sleep.'

He dipped his ladle in the tub  
And drank and yawned and stretched  
him out.

The other shouted, 'You would rob  
My life of every pleasant thought  
And every comfortable thing  
And so take that and that.' Thereon  
He gave him a great pummelling,  
But might have pummelled at a stone  
For all the sleeper knew or cared;  
And after heaped the stones again  
And cursed and prayed, and prayed  
and cursed:

58 THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN

‘Oh God if he got loose!’ And then  
In fury and in panic fled  
From the Hell Mouth at Cruachan  
And gave God thanks that overhead  
The clouds were brightening with the  
dawn.

## THE PLAYER QUEEN

*(Song from an Unfinished Play)*

MY mother dandled me and sang,  
‘How young it is, how young!’  
And made a golden cradle  
That on a willow swung.

‘He went away,’ my mother sang,  
‘When I was brought to bed,’  
And all the while her needle pulled  
The gold and silver thread.

She pulled the thread and bit the  
thread  
And made a golden gown,  
And wept because she had dreamt that I  
Was born to wear a crown.

60      THE PLAYER QUEEN

‘When she was got,’ my mother sang,  
‘I heard a sea-mew cry,  
And saw a flake of the yellow foam  
That dropped upon my thigh.’

How therefore could she help but  
    braid  
The gold into my hair,  
And dream that I should carry  
The golden top of care?

## THE REALISTS

HOPE that you may understand!  
What can books of men that wive  
In a dragon-guarded land,  
Paintings of the dolphin-drawn  
Sea-nymphs in their pearly waggons  
Do, but awake a hope to live  
That had gone  
With the dragons?

# I

## THE WITCH

TOIL and grow rich,  
What's that but to lie  
With a foul witch  
And after, drained dry,  
To be brought  
To the chamber where  
Lies one long sought  
With despair.

## II

### THE PEACOCK

WHAT'S riches to him  
That has made a great peacock  
With the pride of his eye?  
The wind-beaten, stone-grey,  
And desolate Three-rock  
Would nourish his whim.  
Live he or die  
Amid wet rocks and heather,  
His ghost will be gay  
Adding feather to feather  
For the pride of his eye.

## THE MOUNTAIN TOMB

POUR wine and dance if Manhood still  
    have pride,  
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;  
The cataract smokes upon the moun-  
    tain side,  
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

Pull down the blinds, bring fiddle and  
    clarionet  
That there be no foot silent in the  
    room  
Nor mouth from kissing, nor from  
    wine unwet;  
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

In vain, in vain; the cataract still  
    cries



## THE MOUNTAIN TOMB 65

The everlasting taper lights the gloom;  
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes  
Our Father Rosicross sleeps in his  
tomb.

## TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND

### I

DANCE there upon the shore;  
What need have you to care  
For wind or water's roar?  
And tumble out your hair  
That the salt drops have wet;  
Being young you have not known  
The fool's triumph, nor yet  
Love lost as soon as won,  
Nor the best labourer dead  
And all the sheaves to bind.  
What need have you to dread  
The monstrous crying of wind?

### II

Has no one said those daring  
Kind eyes should be more learn'd?

Or warned you how despairing  
The moths are when they are burned,  
I could have warned you, but you are  
    young,  
So we speak a different tongue.

O you will take whatever's offered  
And dream that all the world's a  
    friend,  
Suffer as your mother suffered,  
Be as broken in the end.  
But I am old and you are young,  
And I speak a barbarous tongue.

## A MEMORY OF YOUTH

THE moments passed as at a play,  
I had the wisdom love brings forth;  
I had my share of mother wit  
And yet for all that I could say,  
And though I had her praise for it,  
A cloud blown from the cut-throat  
north  
Suddenly hid love's moon away.

Believing every word I said  
I praised her body and her mind  
Till pride had made her eyes grow  
bright,  
And pleasure made her cheeks grow  
red,  
And vanity her footfall light,  
Yet we, for all that praise, could find  
Nothing but darkness overhead.

We sat as silent as a stone,  
We knew, though she'd not said a  
word,  
That even the best of love must die,  
And had been savagely undone  
Were it not that love upon the cry  
Of a most ridiculous little bird  
Tore from the clouds his marvellous  
moon.

## FALLEN MAJESTY

ALTHOUGH crowds gathered once if  
    she but showed her face,  
And even old men's eyes grew dim,  
    this hand alone,  
Like some last courtier at a gypsy  
    camping place,  
Babbling of fallen majesty, records  
    what's gone.

The lineaments, a heart that laughter  
    has made sweet,  
These, these remain, but I record  
    what's gone. A crowd  
Will gather, and not know it walks  
    the very street  
Whereon a thing once walked that  
    seemed a burning cloud.

## FRIENDS

Now must I these three praise—  
Three women that have wrought  
What joy is in my days;  
One that no passing thought,  
Nor those unpassing cares,  
No, not in these fifteen  
Many times troubled years,  
Could ever come between  
Heart and delighted heart;  
And one because her hand  
Had strength that could unbind  
What none can understand,  
What none can have and thrive,  
Youth's dreamy load, till she  
So changed me that I live  
Labouring in ecstasy.  
And what of her that took  
All till my youth was gone

With scarce a pitying look?  
How should I praise that one?  
When day begins to break  
I count my good and bad,  
Being wakeful for her sake,  
Remembering what she had,  
What eagle look still shows,  
While up from my heart's root  
So great a sweetness flows  
I shake from head to foot.



## THE COLD HEAVEN

SUDDENLY I saw the cold and rook-  
delighting Heaven  
That seemed as though ice burned and  
was but the more ice,  
And thereupon imagination and heart  
were driven  
So wild that every casual thought  
of that and this  
Vanished, and left but memories, that  
should be out of season  
With the hot blood of youth, of love  
crossed long ago;  
And I took all the blame out of all  
sense and reason,  
Until I cried and trembled and rocked  
to and fro,  
Riddled with light. Ah! when the  
ghost begins to quicken,

74      THE COLD HEAVEN

Confusion of the death-bed over, is it  
sent

Out naked on the roads, as the books  
say, and stricken

By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

## THAT THE NIGHT COME

SHE lived in storm and strife,  
Her soul had such desire  
For what proud death may bring  
That it could not endure  
The common good of life,  
But lived as 'twere a king  
That packed his marriage day  
With banneret and pennon,  
Trumpet and kettledrum,  
And the outrageous cannon,  
To bundle time away  
That the night come.

## AN APPOINTMENT

BEING out of heart with government  
I took a broken root to fling  
Where the proud, wayward squirrel  
    went,  
Taking delight that he could spring;  
And he, with that low whinnying  
    sound  
That is like laughter, sprang again  
And so to the other tree at a bound.  
Nor the tame will, nor timid brain,  
Bred that fierce tooth and cleanly  
    limb  
And threw him up to laugh on the  
    bough;  
No government appointed him.

# I

## THE MAGI

Now as at all times I can see in the  
mind's eye,  
In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale  
unsatisfied ones  
Appear and disappear in the blue  
depth of the sky  
With all their ancient faces like rain-  
beaten stones,  
And all their helms of silver hovering  
side by side,  
And all their eyes still fixed, hoping  
to find once more,  
Being by Calvary's turbulence un-  
satisfied,  
The uncontrollable mystery on the  
bestial floor.

## II

### THE DOLLS

A DOLL in the doll-maker's house  
Looks at the cradle and balls:  
'That is an insult to us.'  
But the oldest of all the dolls  
Who had seen, being kept for show,  
Generations of his sort,  
Out-screams the whole shelf: 'Al-  
though  
There's not a man can report  
Evil of this place,  
The man and the woman bring  
Hither to our disgrace,  
A noisy and filthy thing.'  
Hearing him groan and stretch  
The doll-maker's wife is aware  
Her husband has heard the wretch,  
And crouched by the arm of his chair,

She murmurs into his ear,  
Head upon shoulder leant:  
'My dear, my dear, oh dear,  
It was an accident.'

## A COAT

I MADE my song a coat  
Covered with embroideries  
Out of old mythologies  
From heel to throat;  
But the fools caught it,  
Wore it in the world's eye  
As though they'd wrought it.  
Song, let them take it  
For there's more enterprise  
In walking naked.



*While I, from that reed-throated  
whisperer  
Who comes at need, although not now  
as once  
A clear articulation in the air  
But inwardly, surmise companions  
Beyond the fling of the dull ass's hoof,  
—Ben Jonson's phrase—and find when  
June is come  
At Kyle-na-no under that ancient roof  
A sterner conscience and a friendlier  
home,  
I can forgive even that wrong of wrongs,  
Those undreamt accidents that have  
made me  
—Seeing that Fame has perished this  
long while  
Being but a part of ancient ceremony—  
Notorious, till all my priceless things  
Are but a post the passing dogs defile.*



FROM THE GREEN HELMET  
AND OTHER POEMS



## HIS DREAM

I SWAYED upon the gaudy stern  
The butt end of a steering oar,  
And everywhere that I could turn  
Men ran upon the shore.

And though I would have hushed the  
    crowd  
There was no mother's son but said,  
'What is the figure in a shroud  
Upon a gaudy bed?'

And fishes bubbling to the brim  
Cried out upon that thing beneath,  
—It had such dignity of limb—  
By the sweet name of Death.

Though I'd my finger on my lip,  
What could I but take up the song?

And fish and crowd and gaudy ship  
Cried out the whole night long,

Crying amid the glittering sea,  
Naming it with ecstatic breath,  
Because it had such dignity  
By the sweet name of Death.

## A WOMAN HOMER SUNG

IF any man drew near  
When I was young,  
I thought, 'He holds her dear,'  
And shook with hate and fear.  
But oh, 'twas bitter wrong  
If he could pass her by  
With an indifferent eye.

Whereon I wrote and wrought,  
And now, being grey,  
I dream that I have brought  
To such a pitch my thought  
That coming time can say,  
'He shadowed in a glass  
What thing her body was.'

For she had fiery blood  
When I was young,

88 A WOMAN HOMER SUNG

And trod so sweetly proud  
As 'twere upon a cloud,  
A woman Homer sung,  
That life and letters seem  
But an heroic dream.



## THE CONSOLATION

I HAD this thought awhile ago,  
'My darling cannot understand  
What I have done, or what would  
do  
In this blind bitter land.'

And I grew weary of the sun  
Until my thoughts cleared up again,  
Remembering that the best I have  
done  
Was done to make it plain;

That every year I have cried, 'At  
length  
My darling understands it all,  
Because I have come into my strength,  
And words obey my call.'

90      THE CONSOLATION

That had she done so who can say  
What would have shaken from the  
sieve?

I might have thrown poor words away  
And been content to live.

## NO SECOND TROY

WHY should I blame her that she  
filled my days  
With misery, or that she would of late  
Have taught to ignorant men most  
violent ways,  
Or hurled the little streets upon the  
great,  
Had they but courage equal to desire?  
What could have made her peaceful  
with a mind  
That nobleness made simple as a fire,  
With beauty like a tightened bow, a  
kind  
That is not natural in an age like this,  
Being high and solitary and most  
stern?  
Why, what could she have done being  
what she is?  
Was there another Troy for her to  
burn?

## RECONCILIATION

SOME may have blamed you that you  
took away  
The verses that could move them on  
the day  
When, the ears being deafened, the  
sight of the eyes blind  
With lightning you went from me,  
and I could find  
Nothing to make a song about but  
kings,  
Helmets, and swords, and half-for-  
gotten things  
That were like memories of you—but  
now  
We'll out, for the world lives as long  
ago;  
And while we're in our laughing,  
weeping fit,

Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords  
into the pit.

But, dear, cling close to me; since  
you were gone,

My barren thoughts have chilled me  
to the bone.

## KING AND NO KING

‘WOULD it were anything but merely  
voice!’

The No King cried who after that was  
King,

Because he had not heard of anything  
That balanced with a word is more  
than noise;

Yet Old Romance being kind, let him  
prevail

Somewhere or somehow that I have  
forgot,

Though he’d but cannon—Whereas  
we that had thought

To have lit upon as clean and sweet  
a tale

Have been defeated by that pledge  
you gave

In momentary anger long ago;

And I that have not your faith, how  
shall I know

That in the blinding light beyond the  
grave

We'll find so good a thing as that we  
have lost?

The hourly kindness, the day's com-  
mon speech,

The habitual content of each with each  
When neither soul nor body has been  
crossed.

## PEACE

АH, that Time could touch a form  
That could show what Homer's age  
Bred to be a hero's wage.  
'Were not all her life but storm,  
Would not painters paint a form  
Of such noble lines,' I said,  
'Such a delicate high head,  
All that sternness amid charm,  
All that sweetness amid strength?'  
Ah, but peace that comes at length,  
Came when Time had touched her  
form.



## AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE

O HEART, be at peace, because  
Nor knave nor dolt can break  
What's not for their applause,  
Being for a woman's sake.  
Enough if the work has seemed,  
So did she your strength renew,  
A dream that a lion had dreamed  
Till the wilderness cried aloud,  
A secret between you two,  
Between the proud and the proud.

What, still you would have their  
praise!  
But here's a haughtier text,  
The labyrinth of her days  
That her own strangeness perplexed;  
And how what her dreaming gave  
Earned slander, ingratitude,

## 98 AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE

From self-same dolt and knave;  
Aye, and worse wrong than these,  
Yet she, singing upon her road,  
Half lion, half child, is at peace.

## THE FASCINATION OF WHAT'S DIFFICULT

THE fascination of what's difficult  
Has dried the sap out of my veins,  
and rent  
Spontaneous joy and natural content  
Out of my heart. There's something  
ails our colt  
That must, as if it had not holy blood,  
Nor on an Olympus leaped from cloud  
to cloud,  
Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat  
and jolt  
As though it dragged road metal. My  
curse on plays  
That have to be set up in fifty ways,  
On the day's war with every knave  
and dolt,

100      WHAT'S DIFFICULT

Theatre business, management of men.  
I swear before the dawn comes round  
    again  
I'll find the stable and pull out the  
    bolt.

## A DRINKING SONG

WINE comes in at the mouth  
And love comes in at the eye;  
That's all we shall know for truth  
Before we grow old and die.  
I lift the glass to my mouth,  
I look at you, and I sigh.

## THE COMING OF WISDOM WITH TIME

THOUGH leaves are many, the root is  
one;  
Through all the lying days of my  
youth  
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the  
sun;  
Now I may wither into the truth.

ON HEARING THAT THE STUDENTS  
OF OUR NEW UNIVERSITY HAVE  
JOINED THE ANCIENT ORDER OF  
HIBERNIANS AND THE AGITATION  
AGAINST IMMORAL LITERATURE

WHERE, where but here have Pride  
and Truth,  
That long to give themselves for wage,  
To shake their wicked sides at youth  
Restraining reckless middle-age.

TO A POET, WHO WOULD HAVE ME  
PRAISE CERTAIN BAD POETS, IMI-  
TATORS OF HIS AND MINE

You say, as I have often given tongue  
In praise of what another's said or  
    sung,  
'Twere politic to do the like by these;  
But have you known a dog to praise  
    his fleas?



## THE MASK

‘PUT off that mask of burning gold  
With emerald eyes.’

‘O no, my dear, you make so bold  
To find if hearts be wild and wise,  
And yet not cold.’

‘I would but find what’s there to find,  
Love or deceit.’

‘It was the mask engaged your mind,  
And after set your heart to beat,  
Not what’s behind.’

‘But lest you are my enemy,  
I must enquire.’

‘O no, my dear, let all that be,  
What matter, so there is but fire  
In you, in me?’

UPON A HOUSE SHAKEN BY  
THE LAND AGITATION

How should the world be luckier if  
this house,  
Where passion and precision have  
been one  
Time out of mind, became too ruinous  
To breed the lidless eye that loves the  
sun?  
And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts  
that grow  
Where wings have memory of wings,  
and all  
That comes of the best knit to the  
best? Although  
Mean roof-trees were the sturdier for  
its fall,  
How should their luck run high enough  
to reach

THE LAND AGITATION 107

The gifts that govern men, and after  
these

To gradual Time's last gift, a written  
speech

Wrought of high laughter, loveliness  
and ease?

## AT THE ABBEY THEATRE

*(Imitated from Ronsard)*

DEAR Craoibhin Aoibhin, look into  
our case.

When we are high and airy hundreds  
say

That if we hold that flight they'll  
leave the place,

While those same hundreds mock  
another day

Because we have made our art of  
common things,

So bitterly, you'd dream they longed  
to look

All their lives through into some drift  
of wings.

You've dandled them and fed them  
from the book

And know them to the bone; impart  
to us—

We'll keep the secret—a new trick to  
please.

Is there a bridle for this Proteus  
That turns and changes like his  
draughty seas?

Or is there none, most popular of men,  
But when they mock us that we mock  
again?

## THESE ARE THE CLOUDS

THESE are the clouds about the fallen  
sun,  
The majesty that shuts his burning  
eye;  
The weak lay hand on what the  
strong has done,  
Till that be tumbled that was lifted  
high  
And discord follow upon unison,  
And all things at one common level  
lie.  
And therefore, friend, if your great  
race were run  
And these things came, so much the  
more thereby  
Have you made greatness your com-  
panion,

THESE ARE THE CLOUDS 111

Although it be for children that you  
sigh:

These are the clouds about the fallen  
sun,

The majesty that shuts his burning  
eye.

## AT GALWAY RACES

THERE where the course is,  
Delight makes all of the one mind,  
The riders upon the galloping horses,  
The crowd that closes in behind:  
We, too, had good attendance once,  
Hearers and hearteners of the work;  
Aye, horsemen for companions,  
Before the merchant and the clerk  
Breathed on the world with timid  
    breath.

Sing on: sometime, and at some new  
    moon,  
We'll learn that sleeping is not death,  
Hearing the whole earth 'change its  
    tune,

Its flesh being wild, and it again  
Crying aloud as the race course is,  
And we find hearteners among men  
That ride upon horses.



## A FRIEND'S ILLNESS

SICKNESS brought me this  
Thought, in that scale of his:  
Why should I be dismayed  
Though flame had burned the whole  
World, as it were a coal,  
Now I have seen it weighed  
Against a soul?

## ALL THINGS CAN TEMPT ME

ALL things can tempt me from this  
craft of verse:

One time it was a woman's face, or  
worse—

The seeming needs of my fool-driven  
land;

Now nothing but comes readier to the  
hand

Than this accustomed toil. When I  
was young,

I had not given a penny for a song  
Did not the poet sing it with such airs  
That one believed he had a sword  
upstairs;

Yet would be now, could I but have  
my wish,

Colder and dumber and deafer than  
a fish.

## THE YOUNG MAN'S SONG

I WHISPERED, 'I am too young,'  
And then, 'I am old enough;'  
Wherefore I threw a penny  
To find out if I might love.  
'Go and love, go and love, young  
man,  
If the lady be young and fair.'  
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown  
penny,  
I am looped in the loops of her  
hair.

Oh, love is the crooked thing,  
There is nobody wise enough  
To find out all that is in it,  
For he would be thinking of love  
Till the stars had run away,

116 THE YOUNG MAN'S SONG

And the shadows eaten the moon.  
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown  
penny,  
One cannot begin it too soon.

# THE HOUR-GLASS

NEW VERSION—1912



## THE HOUR-GLASS

### THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

WISE MAN.

BRIDGET, his wife.

TEIGUE, a fool.

ANGEL.

Children and Pupils.

*Pupils come in and stand before the stage curtain, which is still closed. One pupil carries a book.*

### FIRST PUPIL

He said we might choose the subject for the lesson.

### SECOND PUPIL

There is none of us wise enough to do that.

## THIRD PUPIL

It would need a great deal of wisdom to know what it is we want to know.

## FOURTH PUPIL

I will question him.

## FIFTH PUPIL

You?

## FOURTH PUPIL

Last night I dreamt that some one came and told me to question him. I was to say to him, 'You were wrong to say there is no God and no soul—maybe, if there is not much of either, there is yet some tatters, some tag on the wind—so to speak—some rag upon a bush, some bob-tail of a god.' I will argue with him,—nonsense though it be—according to my dream, and you will see how well I can argue, and what thoughts I have.



FIRST PUPIL

I'd as soon listen to dried peas in  
a bladder, as listen to your thoughts.

*[Fool comes in.]*

FOOL

Give me a penny.

SECOND PUPIL

Let us choose a subject by chance.  
Here is his big book. Let us turn  
over the pages slowly. Let one of us  
put down his finger without looking.  
The passage his finger lights on will  
be the subject for the lesson.

FOOL

Give me a penny.

THIRD PUPIL

*(Taking up book)* How heavy it  
is.

FOURTH PUPIL

Spread it on Teigue's back, and then we can all stand round and see the choice.

SECOND PUPIL

Make him spread out his arms.

FOURTH PUPIL

Down on your knees. Hunch up your back. Spread your arms out now, and look like a golden eagle in a church. Keep still, keep still.

FOOL

Give me a penny.

THIRD PUPIL

Is that the right cry for an eagle cock?

SECOND PUPIL

I'll turn the pages—you close your eyes and put your finger down.

THIRD PUPIL

That's it, and then he cannot blame us for the choice.

FIRST PUPIL

There, I have chosen. Fool, keep still—and if what's wise is strange and sounds like nonsense, we've made a good choice.

FIFTH PUPIL

The Master has come.

FOOL

Will anybody give a penny to a fool?

*[One of the pupils draws back the stage curtain showing the Master sitting at his desk. There is an hour-glass upon his desk or in a bracket on the wall. One pupil puts the book before him.]*

FIRST PUPIL

We have chosen the passage for the lesson, Master. 'There are two

124      THE HOUR-GLASS

living countries, one visible and one invisible, and when it is summer there, it is winter here, and when it is November with us, it is lambing-time there.'

WISE MAN

That passage, that passage! what mischief has there been since yesterday?

FIRST PUPIL

None, Master.

WISE MAN

Oh yes, there has; some craziness has fallen from the wind, or risen from the graves of old men, and made you choose that subject.

FOURTH PUPIL

I knew that it was folly, but they would have it.

THIRD PUPIL

Had we not better say we picked it by chance?

SECOND PUPIL

No; he would say we were children still.

FIRST PUPIL

I have found a sentence under that one that says—as though to show it had a hidden meaning—a beggar wrote it upon the walls of Babylon.

WISE MAN

Then find some beggar and ask him what it means, for I will have nothing to do with it.

FOURTH PUPIL

Come, Teigue, what is the old book's meaning when it says that there are sheep that drop their lambs in November?

## FOOL

To be sure—everybody knows, everybody in the world knows, when it is Spring with us, the trees are withering there, when it is Summer with us, the snow is falling there, and have I not myself heard the lambs that are there all bleating on a cold November day—to be sure, does not everybody with an intellect know that; and maybe when it's night with us, it is day with them, for many a time I have seen the roads lighted before me.

## WISE MAN

The beggar who wrote that on Babylon wall meant that there is a spiritual kingdom that cannot be seen or known till the faculties whereby we master the kingdom of this world wither away, like green things in winter. A monkish thought, the

most mischievous thought that ever passed out of a man's mouth.

FIRST PUPIL

If he meant all that, I will take an oath that he was spindle-shanked, and cross-eyed, and had a lousy itching shoulder, and that his heart was crosser than his eyes, and that he wrote it out of malice.

SECOND PUPIL

Let's come away and find a better subject.

FOURTH PUPIL

And maybe now you'll let me choose.

FIRST PUPIL

Come.

WISE MAN

Were it but true 'twould alter every-  
thing  
Until the stream of the world had  
changed its course,

And that and all our thoughts had run  
 Into some cloudy thunderous spring  
 They dream to be its source—  
 Aye, to some frenzy of the mind;  
 And all that we have done would be  
           undone,  
 Our speculation but as the wind.

[*A pause.*]

I have dreamed it twice.

FIRST PUPIL

Something has troubled him.  
[*Pupils go out.*]

## WISE MAN

Twice have I dreamed it in a morning  
dream,  
Now nothing serves my pupils but to  
come  
With a like thought. Reason is grow-  
ing dim;  
A moment more and Frenzy will beat  
his drum



And laugh aloud and scream;  
 And I must dance in the dream.  
 No, no, but it is like a hawk, a hawk of  
     the air,  
 It has swooped down—and this swoop  
     makes the third—  
 And what can I, but tremble like a  
     bird?

FOOL

Give me a penny.

WISE MAN

That I should dream it twice, and  
 after that, that they should pick it out.

FOOL

Won't you give me a penny?

WISE MAN

What do you want? What can it  
 matter to you whether the words I  
 am reading are wisdom or sheer folly?

FOOL

Such a great, wise teacher will not refuse a penny to a fool.

WISE MAN

Seeing that everybody is a fool when he is asleep and dreaming, why do you call me wise?

FOOL

O, I know,—I know, I know what I have seen.

WISE MAN

Well, to see rightly is the whole of wisdom, whatever dream be with us.

FOOL

When I went by Kilcluan, where the bells used to be ringing at the break of every day, I could hear nothing but the people snoring in their houses. When I went by Tubber-

vanach, where the young men used to be climbing the hill to the blessed well, they were sitting at the cross-roads playing cards. When I went by Carrigoras, where the friars used to be fasting and serving the poor, I saw them drinking wine and obeying their wives. And when I asked what misfortune had brought all these changes, they said it was no misfortune, but that it was the wisdom they had learned from your teaching.

#### WISE MAN

And you too have called me wise—you would be paid for that good opinion doubtless—Run to the kitchen, my wife will give you food and drink.

#### FOOL

That's foolish advice for a wise man to give.

WISE MAN

Why, Fool?

FOOL

What is eaten is gone—I want pennies for my bag. I must buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time the sun is weak, and snares to catch the rabbits and the hares, and a big pot to cook them in.

WISE MAN

I have more to think about than giving pennies to your like, so run away.

FOOL

Give me a penny and I will bring you luck. The fishermen let me sleep among their nets in the loft because I bring them luck; and in the summer time, the wild creatures let me sleep near their nests and their holes. It

is lucky even to look at me, but it is much more lucky to give me a penny. If I was not lucky I would starve.

WISE MAN

What are the shears for?

FOOL

I won't tell you. If I told you, you would drive them away.

WISE MAN

Drive them away! Who would I drive away?

FOOL

I won't tell you.

WISE MAN

Not if I give you a penny?

FOOL

No.

WISE MAN

Not if I give you two pennies?

FOOL

You will be very lucky if you give me two pennies, but I won't tell you.

WISE MAN

Three pennies?

FOOL

Four, and I will tell you.

WISE MAN

Very well—four, but from this out I will not call you Teigue the Fool.

FOOL

Let me come close to you, where nobody will hear me; but first you must promise not to drive them away. (*Wise Man nods.*) Every day men go out dressed in black and spread great black nets over the hills, great black nets.

WISE MAN

A strange place that to fish in.

FOOL

They spread them out on the hills  
that they may catch the feet of the  
angels; but every morning just before  
the dawn, I go out and cut the nets  
with the shears and the angels fly  
away.

WISE MAN

(*Speaking with excitement*) Ah, now  
I know that you are Teigue the Fool.  
You say that I am wise, and yet I say,  
there are no angels.

FOOL

I have seen plenty of angels.

WISE MAN

No, no, you have not.

## FOOL

They are plenty if you but look about you. They are like the blades of grass.

## WISE MAN

They are plenty as the blades of grass—I heard that phrase when I was but a child and was told folly.

## FOOL

When one gets quiet. When one is so quiet that there is not a thought in one's head maybe, there is something that wakes up inside one, something happy and quiet, and then all in a minute one can smell summer flowers, and tall people go by, happy and laughing, but they will not let us look at their faces. Oh no, it is not right that we should look at their faces.



WISE MAN

You have fallen asleep upon a hill,  
yet, even those that used to dream of  
angels dream now of other things.

FOOL

I saw one but a moment ago—  
that is because I am lucky. It was  
coming behind me, but it was not  
laughing.

WISE MAN

There's nothing but what men can  
see when they are awake. Nothing,  
nothing.

FOOL

I knew you would drive them away.

WISE MAN

Pardon me, Fool,  
I had forgotten who I spoke to.  
Well, there are your four pennies—  
Fool you are called,

138      THE HOUR-GLASS

And all day long they cry, 'Come  
hither, Fool.'

*[The Fool goes close to him.]*

Or else it's, 'Fool, be gone.'

*[The Fool goes further off.]*

Or, 'Fool, stand there.'

*[The Fool straightens himself up.]*

Or, 'Fool, go sit in the corner.'

*[The Fool sits in the corner.]*

And all the while  
What were they all but fools before I  
came?

What are they now, but mirrors that  
seem men,

Because of my image? Fool. hold up  
your head. *[Fool does so.]*

What foolish stories they have told of  
the ghosts

That fumbled with the clothes upon  
the bed,

Or creaked and shuffled in the corridor,  
Or else, if they were pious bred,  
Of angels from the skies,

That coming through the door,  
 Or, it may be, standing there,  
 Would solidly out stare  
 The steadiest eyes with their un-  
     natural eyes,  
 Aye, on a man's own floor.

*[An angel has come in. It should  
     be played by a man if a man  
     can be found with the right  
     voice, and may wear a little  
     golden domino and a halo made  
     of metal. Or the whole face  
     may be a beautiful mask, in  
     which case the last sentence on  
     page 136 should not be spoken.]*

Yet it is strange, the strangest thing  
     I have known,  
 That I should still be haunted by the  
     notion  
 That there's a crisis of the spirit  
     wherein  
 We get new sight, and that they know  
     some trick

140      THE HOUR-GLASS

To turn our thoughts for their own  
ends to frenzy.

Why do you put your finger to your lip,  
And creep away?      [*Fool goes out.*

(*Wise Man sees Angel.*) What are  
you? Who are you?

I think I saw some like you in my  
dreams,

When but a child. That thing about  
your head,—

That brightness in your hair—that  
flowery branch;

But I have done with dreams, I have  
done with dreams.

ANGEL

I am the crafty one that you have  
called.

WISE MAN

How that I called?

ANGEL

I am the messenger.

WISE MAN

What message could you bring to one  
like me?

ANGEL (*turning the hour-glass*)

That you will die when the last grain  
of sand  
Has fallen through this glass.

WISE MAN

I have a wife.  
Children and pupils that I cannot  
leave:  
Why must I die, my time is far away?

ANGEL

You have to die because no soul has  
passed  
The heavenly threshold since you have  
opened school,  
But grass grows there, and rust upon  
the hinge;

142      THE HOUR-GLASS

And they are lonely that must keep  
the watch.

WISE MAN

And whither shall I go when I am  
dead?

ANGEL

You have denied there is a purgatory,  
Therefore that gate is closed; you  
have denied  
There is a heaven, and so that gate is  
closed.

WISE MAN

Where then? For I have said there  
is no hell.

ANGEL

Hell is the place of those who have  
denied;  
They find there what they planted and  
what dug,

A Lake of Spaces, and a Wood of  
Nothing,  
And wander there and drift, and never  
cease  
Wailing for substance.

WISE MAN

Pardon me, blessed Angel,  
I have denied and taught the like to  
others.  
But how could I believe before my  
sight  
Had come to me?

ANGEL

It is too late for pardon.

WISE MAN

Had I but met your gaze as now I  
met it—  
But how can you that live but where  
we go  
In the uncertainty of dizzy dreams

144      THE HOUR-GLASS

Know why we doubt? Parting, sickness and death,  
The rotting of the grass, tempest and drouth,  
These are the messengers that came to me.  
Why are you silent? You carry in your hands  
God's pardon, and you will not give it me.  
Why are you silent? Were I not afraid,  
I'd kiss your hands—no, no, the hem of your dress.

ANGEL

Only when all the world has testified,  
May soul confound it, crying out in joy,  
And laughing on its lonely precipice.  
What's dearth and death and sickness to the soul  
That knows no virtue but itself? Nor could it,



So trembling with delight and mother-  
naked,  
Live unabashed if the arguing world  
stood by.

WISE MAN

It is as hard for you to understand  
Why we have doubted, as it is for us  
To banish doubt—what folly have I  
said?

There can be nothing that you do not  
know:

Give me a year—a month—a week—  
a day,

I would undo what I have done—an  
hour—

Give me until the sand has run in the  
glass.

ANGEL

Though you may not undo what you  
have done,

I have this power—if you but find one  
soul,

146      THE HOUR-GLASS

Before the sands have fallen, that still  
believes,  
One fish to lie and spawn among the  
stones  
Till the great fisher's net is full again,  
You may, the purgatorial fire being  
passed,  
Spring to your peace.

*[Pupils sing in the distance.]*

'Who stole your wits away  
And where are they gone?'

WISE MAN

My pupils come,  
Before you have begun to climb the  
sky  
I shall have found that soul. They  
say they doubt,  
But what their mothers dinned into  
their ears  
Cannot have been so lightly rooted up;  
Besides, I can disprove what I once  
proved—

And yet give me some thought, some  
argument,  
More mighty than my own.

ANGEL

Farewell—farewell,  
For I am weary of the weight of time.

*[Angel goes out. Wise Man makes  
a step to follow and pauses.  
Some of his pupils come  
in at the other side of the  
stage.]*

FIRST PUPIL

Master, master, you must choose the  
subject.

*[Enter other pupils with Fool,  
about whom they dance; all  
the pupils may have little  
cushions on which presently  
they seat themselves.]*

SECOND PUPIL

Here is a subject—where have the  
Fool's wits gone? (*singing*)  
'Who dragged your wits away  
Where no one knows?  
Or have they run off  
On their own pair of shoes?'

FOOL

Give me a penny.

FIRST PUPIL

The Master will find your wits,

SECOND PUPIL

And when they are found, you must  
not beg for pennies.

THIRD PUPIL

They are hidden somewhere in the  
badger's hole,  
But you must carry an old candle end  
If you would find them.

FOURTH PUPIL

They are up above the clouds.

FOOL

Give me a penny, give me a penny.

FIRST PUPIL (*singing*)

‘I’ll find your wits again,  
Come, for I saw them roll,  
To where old badger mumbles  
In the black hole.’

SECOND PUPIL (*singing*)

‘No, but an angel stole them  
The night that you were born,  
And now they are but a rag,  
On the moon’s horn.’

WISE MAN

Be silent.

FIRST PUPIL

Can you not see that he is troubled?

[*All the pupils are seated.*]

150      THE HOUR-GLASS

WISE MAN

What do you think of when alone at  
night?

Do not the things your mothers spoke  
about,

Before they took the candle from the  
bedside,

Rush up into the mind and master it,  
Till you believe in them against your  
will?

SECOND PUPIL (*to first pupil*)

You answer for us.

THIRD PUPIL (*in a whisper to first  
pupil*)

Be careful what you say;  
If he persuades you to an argument,  
He will but turn us all to mockery.

FIRST PUPIL

We had no minds until you made them  
for us;

Our bodies only were our mothers'  
work.

WISE MAN

You answer with incredible things.

It is certain

That there is one,—though it may be  
but one—

Believes in God and in some heaven  
and hell—

In all those things we put into our  
prayers.

FIRST PUPIL

We thought those things before our  
minds were born,

But that was long ago—we are not  
children.

WISE MAN

You are afraid to tell me what you think  
Because I am hot and angry when I  
am crossed.

I do not blame you for it; but have  
no fear,

152      THE HOUR-GLASS

For if there's one that sat on smiling  
there,  
As though my arguments were sweet  
as milk  
Yet found them bitter, I will thank  
him for it,  
If he but speak his mind.

FIRST PUPIL

There is no one, Master,  
There is not one but found them sweet  
as milk.

WISE MAN

The things that have been told us in  
our childhood  
Are not so fragile.

SECOND PUPIL

We are no longer children.

THIRD PUPIL

We all believe in you and in what you  
have taught.



OTHER PUPILS

All, all, all, all, in you, nothing but  
you.

WISE MAN

I have deceived you—where shall I go  
for words—

I have no thoughts—my mind has  
been swept bare.

The messengers that stand in the fiery  
cloud,

Fling themselves out, if we but dare  
to question,

And after that, the Babylonian moon  
Blots all away.

FIRST PUPIL (*to other pupils*)

I take his words to mean  
That visionaries, and martyrs when  
they are raised  
Above translunary things, and there  
enlightened,

154      THE HOUR-GLASS

As the contention is, may lose the  
light,  
And flounder in their speech when  
the eyes open.

SECOND PUPIL

How well he imitates their trick of  
speech.

THIRD PUPIL

Their air of mystery.

FOURTH PUPIL

                                Their empty gaze,  
As though they'd looked upon some  
winged thing,  
And would not condescend to mankind  
after.

FIRST PUPIL

Master, we have all learnt that truth  
is learnt  
When the intellect's deliberate and  
cold,

As it were a polished mirror that reflects

An unchanged world; and not when  
the steel melts,

Bubbling and hissing, till there's  
naught but fume.

WISE MAN

When it is melted, when it all fumes up,  
They walk, as when beside those three  
in the furnace

The form of the fourth.

FIRST PUPIL

Master, there's none among us  
That has not heard your mockery of  
these,

Or thoughts like these, and we have  
not forgot.

WISE MAN

Something incredible has happened—  
some one has come

Suddenly like a grey hawk out of the  
air,  
And all that I declared untrue is  
true.

FIRST PUPIL (*to other pupils*)

You'd think the way he says it, that  
he felt it.  
There's not a mummer to compare  
with him.  
He's something like a man.

## SECOND PUPIL

Give us some proof.

## WISE MAN

What proof have I to give, but that  
 an angel  
 An instant ago was standing on that  
 spot. *[The pupils rise.]*

### THIRD PUPIL

You dreamed it.

## WISE MAN

I was awake as I am now.

FIRST PUPIL (*to the others*)

I may be dreaming now for all I know.  
He wants to show we have no certain  
proof  
Of anything in the world.

## SECOND PUPIL

There is this proof  
That shows we are awake—we have all  
one world  
While every dreamer has a world of  
his own,  
And sees what no one else can.

## THIRD PUPIL

Teigue sees angels.  
So when the Master says he has seen  
an angel,  
He may have seen one.

FIRST PUPIL

Both may still be dreamers;  
Unless it's proved the angels were  
alike.

SECOND PUPIL

What sort are the angels, Teigue?

THIRD PUPIL

That will prove nothing,  
Unless we are sure prolonged obedience  
Has made one angel like another angel  
As they were eggs.

FIRST PUPIL

The Master's silent now:  
For he has found that to dispute with  
us—  
Seeing that he has taught us what we  
know—  
Is but to reason with himself. Let us  
away,  
And find if there is one believer left.

WISE MAN

Yes, yes. Find me but one that still  
believes

The things that we were told when  
we were children.

THIRD PUPIL

He'll mock and maul him.

FOURTH PUPIL

From the first I knew  
He wanted somebody to argue with.

*[They go.]*

WISE MAN

I have no reason left. All dark, all  
dark!

*[Pupils return laughing. They  
push forward fourth pupil.]*

FIRST PUPIL

Here, Master, is the very man you  
want.

160      THE HOUR-GLASS

He said, when we were studying the  
book,  
That maybe after all the monks were  
right,  
And you mistaken, and if we but gave  
him time,  
He'd prove that it was so.

FOURTH PUPIL

I never said it.

WISE MAN

Dear friend, dear friend, do you be-  
lieve in God?

FOURTH PUPIL

Master, they have invented this to  
mock me.

WISE MAN

You are afraid of me.



FOURTH PUPIL

They know well, Master,  
That all I said was but to make them  
    argue.  
They've pushed me in to make a mock  
    of me,  
Because they knew I could take either  
    side  
And beat them at it.

WISE MAN

If you believe in God,  
You are my soul's one friend.

*[Pupils laugh.*

Mistress or wife  
Can give us but our good or evil luck  
Amid the howling world, but you shall  
    give  
Eternity, and those sweet-throated  
    things  
That drift above the moon.

*[The pupils look at one another  
and are silent.*

162      THE HOUR-GLASS

SECOND PUPIL

How strange he is.

WISE MAN

The angel that stood there upon that  
spot,  
Said that my soul was lost unless I  
found out  
One that believed.

FOURTH PUPIL

Cease mocking at me, Master,  
For I am certain that there is no God  
Nor immortality, and they that said it  
Made a fantastic tale from a starved  
dream  
To plague our hearts. Will that con-  
tent you, Master?

WISE MAN

The giddy glass is emptier every  
moment,  
And you stand there, debating, laugh-  
ing and wrangling.

Out of my sight! Out of my sight, I  
say. *[He drives them out.]*

I'll call my wife, for what can women  
do,

That carry us in the darkness of their  
bodies,

But mock the reason that lets nothing  
grow

Unless it grow in light. Bridget,  
Bridget.

A woman never ceases to believe,

Say what we will. Bridget, come  
quickly, Bridget.

*[Bridget comes in wearing her  
apron. Her sleeves turned up  
from her arms, which are  
covered with flour.]*

Wife, what do you believe in? Tell  
me the truth,

And not—as is the habit with you  
all—

Something you think will please me.  
Do you pray?

164      THE HOUR-GLASS

Sometimes when you're alone in the  
house, do you pray?

BRIDGET

Prayers—no, you taught me to leave  
them off long ago. At first I was sorry,  
but I am glad now, for I am sleepy in  
the evenings.

WISE MAN

Do you believe in God?

BRIDGET

Oh, a good wife only believes in  
what her husband tells her.

WISE MAN

But sometimes, when the children are  
asleep  
And I am in the school, do you not  
think  
About the Martyrs and the saints and  
the angels,

And all the things that you believed  
in once?

BRIDGET

I think about nothing—sometimes  
I wonder if the linen is bleaching  
white, or I go out to see if the crows  
are picking up the chickens' food.

WISE MAN

My God,—my God! I will go out  
myself.

My pupils said that they would find a  
man

Whose faith I never shook—they may  
have found him.

Therefore I will go out—but if I go,  
The glass will let the sands run out  
unseen.

I cannot go—I cannot leave the glass.  
Go call my pupils—I can explain all  
now,

Only when all our hold on life is  
troubled,



For somebody might shake it, and the  
sand

If it were shaken might run down on  
the instant.

BRIDGET

I don't understand a word you are  
saying. There's a crowd of people  
talking to your pupils.

WISE MAN

Go out and find if they have found a  
man

Who did not understand me when I  
taught,

Or did not listen.

BRIDGET

It is a hard thing to be married to  
a man of learning that must always be  
having arguments. [*She goes out.*]

## WISE MAN

Strange that I should be blind to the  
great secret,

And that so simple a man might write  
it out

Upon a blade of grass or bit of rush  
With naught but berry juice, and  
laugh to himself

Writing it out, because it was so  
simple.

*[Enter Bridget followed by the Fool.]*

## FOOL

Give me something; give me a  
penny to buy bacon in the shops and  
nuts in the market, and strong drink  
for the time when the sun is weak.

## BRIDGET

I have no pennies. (*To Wise Man*)  
Your pupils cannot find anybody to  
argue with you. There's nobody in



the whole country with belief enough for a lover's oath. Can't you be quiet now, and not always wanting to have arguments? It must be terrible to have a mind like that.

WISE MAN

Then I am lost indeed.

BRIDGET

Leave me alone now, I have to make the bread for you and the children. *[She goes into kitchen.]*

WISE MAN

Children, children!

BRIDGET

Your father wants you, run to him. *[Children run in.]*

WISE MAN

Come to me, children. Do not be afraid.

170      THE HOUR-GLASS

I want to know if you believe in  
Heaven,  
God or the soul—no, do not tell me  
yet;  
You need not be afraid I shall be  
angry,  
Say what you please—so that it is  
your thought—  
I wanted you to know before you  
spoke,  
That I shall not be angry.

FIRST CHILD

We have not forgotten, Father.

SECOND CHILD

Oh no, Father.

BOTH CHILDREN

*(As if repeating a lesson)* There is  
nothing we cannot see, nothing we  
cannot touch.

## FIRST CHILD

Foolish people used to say that  
there was, but you have taught us  
better.

## WISE MAN

Go to your mother, go—yet do not go.  
What can she say? If I am dumb you  
are lost;  
And yet, because the sands are run-  
ning out,  
I have but a moment to show it all  
in. Children,  
The sap would die out of the blades of  
grass  
Had they a doubt. They understand  
it all,  
Being the fingers of God's certainty,  
Yet can but make their sign into the  
air;  
But could they find their tongues  
they'd show it all;  
But what am I to say that am but one,

172      THE HOUR-GLASS

When they are millions and they will  
not speak—

[*Children have run out.*

But they are gone; what made them  
run away?

[*The Fool comes in with a dan-  
delion*

Look at me, tell me if my face is  
changed,

Is there a notch of the fiend's nail  
upon it

Already? Is it terrible to sight?

Because the moment's near.

[*Going to glass.*

I dare not look,

I dare not know the moment when  
they come.

No, no, I dare not. (*Covers glass.*)

Will there be a footfall,

Or will there be a sort of rending  
sound,

Or else a cracking, as though an iron  
claw

Had gripped the threshold stone?

*[Fool has begun to blow the dandelion.]*

What are you doing?

FOOL

Wait a minute—four—five—six—

WISE MAN

What are you doing that for?

FOOL

I am blowing the dandelion to find out what hour it is.

WISE MAN

You have heard everything, and that is why

You'd find what hour it is—you'd find that out,

That you may look upon a fleet of devils

Dragging my soul away. You shall not stop,

174      THE HOUR-GLASS

I will have no one here when they  
    come in,

I will have no one sitting there—no  
    one—

And yet—and yet—there is some-  
    thing strange about you.

I half remember something. What  
    is it?

Do you believe in God and in the soul?

FOOL

So you ask me now. I thought  
when you were asking your pupils,  
'Will he ask Teigue the Fool? Yes,  
he will, he will; no, he will not—yes,  
he will.' But Teigue will say nothing.  
Teigue will say nothing.

WISE MAN

Tell me quickly.

FOOL

I said, 'Teigue knows everything, not

even the green-eyed cats and the hares that milk the cows have Teigue's wisdom'; but Teigue will not speak, he says nothing.

## WISE MAN

Speak, speak, for underneath the cover  
there

The sand is running from the upper  
glass,

And when the last grain's through, I  
shall be lost.

## FOOL

I will not speak. I will not tell  
you what is in my mind. I will not  
tell you what is in my bag. You  
might steal away my thoughts. I  
met a bodach on the road yesterday,  
and he said, 'Teigue, tell me how  
many pennies are in your bag; I  
will wager three pennies that there are

176      THE HOUR-GLASS

not twenty pennies in your bag; let me put in my hand and count them.' But I gripped the bag the tighter, and when I go to sleep at night I hide the bag where nobody knows.

WISE MAN

There's but one pinch of sand, and I  
am lost  
If you are not he I seek.

FOOL

O, what a lot the Fool knows, but  
he says nothing.

WISE MAN

Yes, I remember now. You spoke of  
angels.  
You said but now that you had seen  
an angel.  
You are the one I seek, and I am saved.



## FOOL

Oh no. How could poor Teigue see angels? Oh, Teigue tells one tale here, another there, and everybody gives him pennies. If Teigue had not his tales he would starve.

*[He breaks away and goes out.]*

## WISE MAN

The last hope is gone,  
And now that it's too late I see it all,  
We perish into God and sink away  
Into reality—the rest's a dream.

*[The Fool comes back.]*

## FOOL

There was one there—there by the threshold stone, waiting there; and he said, 'Go in, Teigue, and tell him everything that he asks you. He will give you a penny if you tell him.'

## WISE MAN

I know enough, that know God's will  
prevails.

## FOOL

Waiting till the moment had come  
—That is what the one out there was  
saying, but I might tell you what you  
asked. That is what he was saying.

## WISE MAN

Be silent. May God's will prevail on  
the instant,  
Although His will be my eternal pain.  
I have no question:  
It is enough, I know what fixed the  
station  
Of star and cloud.  
And knowing all, I cry  
That what so God has willed  
On the instant be fulfilled,  
Though that be my damnation.

The stream of the world has changed  
 its course,  
 And with the stream my thoughts  
 have run  
 Into some cloudy thunderous spring  
 That is its mountain source—  
 Aye, to some frenzy of the mind,  
 For all that we have done's undone,  
 Our speculation but as the wind.

*[He dies.]*

#### FOOL

Wise man—Wise man, wake up  
 and I will tell you everything for a  
 penny. It is I, poor Teigue the Fool.  
 Why don't you wake up, and say,  
 'There is a penny for you, Teigue'?  
 No, no, you will say nothing. You  
 and I, we are the two fools, we know  
 everything, but we will not speak.

*[Angel enters holding a casket.]*

O, look what has come from his  
 mouth! O, look what has come from  
 his mouth—the white butterfly! He

is dead, and I have taken his soul in my hands; but I know why you open the lid of that golden box. I must give it to you. There then, (*he puts butterfly in casket*) he has gone through his pains, and you will open the lid in the Garden of Paradise. (*He closes curtain and remains outside it.*) He is gone, he is gone, he is gone, but come in, everybody in the world, and look at me.

‘I hear the wind a blow

I hear the grass a grow,

And all that I know, I know.’

But I will not speak, I will run away.

[*He goes out.*]

## NOTES



## NOTES

### PREFATORY POEM

‘FREE of the ten and four’ is an error I cannot now correct, without more rewriting than I have a mind for. Some merchant in Villon, I forget the reference, was ‘free of the ten and four.’ Irish merchants exempted from certain duties by the Irish Parliament were, unless memory deceives me again for I am writing away from books, ‘free of the eight and six.’

POEMS BEGINNING WITH THAT ‘TO A WEALTHY  
MAN’ AND ENDING WITH THAT ‘TO A  
SHADE’

During the thirty years or so during which I have been reading Irish newspapers, three public controversies have stirred my imagination. The first was the Parnell controversy. There were reasons to justify a man’s joining either party, but there were none to justify, on one side or on the other, lying accusations forgetful of past service, a frenzy of detraction. And another was the dispute over ‘The Playboy.’ There were reasons for opposing as for supporting that violent, laughing thing,

but none for the lies, for the unscrupulous rhetoric spread against it in Ireland, and from Ireland to America. The third prepared for the Corporation's refusal of a building for Sir Hugh Lane's famous collection of pictures.

One could respect the argument that Dublin, with much poverty and many slums, could not afford the £22,000 the building was to cost the city, but not the minds that used it. One frenzied man compared the pictures to Troy horse which 'destroyed a city,' and innumerable correspondents described Sir Hugh Lane and those who had subscribed many thousands to give Dublin paintings by Corot, Manet, Monet, Degas, and Renoir, as 'self-seekers,' 'self-advertisers,' 'picture-dealers,' 'log-rolling cranks and faddists,' and one clerical paper told 'picture-dealer Lane' to take himself and his pictures out of that. A member of the Corporation said there were Irish artists who could paint as good if they had a mind to, and another described a half-hour in the temporary gallery in Harcourt Street as the most dismal of his life. Some one else asked instead of these eccentric pictures to be given pictures 'like those beautiful productions displayed in the windows of our city picture shops.' Another thought that we would all be more patriotic if we



devoted our energy to fighting the Insurance Act. Another would not hang them in his kitchen, while yet another described the vogue of French impressionist painting as having gone to such a length among 'log-rolling enthusiasts' that they even admired 'works that were rejected from the Salon forty years ago by the finest critics in the world.'

The first serious opposition began in the *Irish Catholic*, the chief Dublin clerical paper, and Mr. William Murphy, the organiser of the recent lock-out and Mr. Healy's financial supporter in his attack upon Parnell, a man of great influence, brought to its support a few days later his newspapers *The Evening Herald* and *The Irish Independent*, the most popular of Irish daily papers. He replied to my poem 'To a Wealthy Man' (I was thinking of a very different wealthy man) from what he described as 'Paudeen's point of view,' and 'Paudeen's point of view' it was. The enthusiasm for 'Sir Hugh Lane's Corots'—one paper spelled the name repeatedly 'Crot'—being but 'an exotic fashion,' waited 'some satirist like Gilbert' who 'killed the æsthetic craze,' and as for the rest 'there were no greater humbugs in the world than art critics and so-called experts.' As the first avowed reason for opposition, the necessities of the poor got

but a few lines, not so many certainly as the objection of various persons to supply Sir Hugh Lane with 'a monument at the city's expense,' and as the gallery was supported by Mr. James Larkin, the chief Labour leader, and important slum workers, I assume that the purpose of the opposition was not exclusively charitable.

These controversies, political, literary, and artistic, have showed that neither religion nor politics can of itself create minds with enough receptivity to become wise, or just and generous enough to make a nation. Other cities have been as stupid—Samuel Butler laughs at shocked Montreal for hiding the Discobolus in a cellar—but Dublin is the capital of a nation, and an ancient race has nowhere else to look for an education. Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister* describes a saintly and naturally gracious woman, who getting into a quarrel over some trumpery detail of religious observance, grows—she and all her little religious community—angry and vindictive. In Ireland I am constantly reminded of that fable of the futility of all discipline that is not of the whole being. Religious Ireland—and the pious Protestants of my childhood were signal examples—thinks of divine things as a round of duties separated from life and not as an

element that may be discovered in all circumstance and emotion, while political Ireland sees the good citizen but as a man who holds to certain opinions and not as a man of good will. Against all this we have but a few educated men and the remnants of an old traditional culture among the poor. Both were stronger forty years ago, before the rise of our new middle class which showed as its first public event, during the nine years of the Parnellite split, how base at moments of excitement are minds without culture. 1914.

‘Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone’ sounds old-fashioned now. It seemed true in 1913, but I did not foresee 1916. The late Dublin Rebellion, whatever one can say of its wisdom, will long be remembered for its heroism. ‘They weighed so lightly what they gave,’ and gave too in some cases without hope of success. July 1916.

### THE DOLLS

The fable for this poem came into my head while I was giving some lectures in Dublin. I had noticed once again how all thought among us is frozen into ‘something other than human life.’ After I had made the poem, I looked up one day into the blue of the sky, and suddenly imagined, as if lost in the blue of the sky, stiff

figures in procession. I remembered that they were the habitual image suggested by blue sky, and looking for a second fable called them 'The Magi', complimentary forms to those enraged dolls.

### THE HOUR-GLASS

A friend suggested to me the subject of this play, an Irish folk-tale from Lady Wilde's *Ancient Legends*. I have for years struggled with something which is charming in the naive legend but a platitude on the stage. I did not discover till a year ago that if the wise man humbled himself to the fool and received salvation as his reward, so much more powerful are pictures than words, no explanatory dialogue could set the matter right. I was faintly pleased when I converted a music-hall singer and kept him going to Mass for six weeks, so little responsibility does one feel for those to whom one has never been introduced; but I was always ashamed when I saw any friend of my own in the theatre. Now I have made my philosopher accept God's will, whatever it is, and find his courage again, and helped by the elaboration of verse, have so changed the fable that it is not false to my own thoughts of the world.

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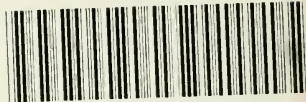
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